

GUIDE TO YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

IN UNDERAGE DRINKING PREVENTION EVENTS



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Every two years since 2006, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)—as the lead agency for the Interagency Coordinating Committee on the Prevention of Underage Drinking (ICCPUD)—has sponsored nationwide Town Hall Meetings to prevent underage drinking. Community-based organizations in all 50 states and most U.S. territories have held Town Hall Meetings to mobilize communities around underage drinking prevention initiatives at the local, state, and national levels.

Youth and young adults have many ideas and opinions about the issues that affect their daily lives, including their health. In 2014, young people took part in more than three-quarters (76 percent) of Town Hall Meetings and were key speakers at nearly half (48 percent) of these events. They also participated as audience members in more than a quarter (27 percent) of all Town Hall Meetings.

The purpose of this guide is to help organizations such as yours harness the amazing power of young people in planning and conducting efforts to prevent and reduce underage drinking.



For more information
about Town Hall Meetings, visit
[www.stopalcoholabuse.net/
townhallmeetings](http://www.stopalcoholabuse.net/townhallmeetings),
call 1-866-419-2514 (toll free), or
e-mail info@stopalcoholabuse.net.

BENEFITS TO ORGANIZATIONS OF INVOLVING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

When young people are involved in prevention, everyone wins. Not only are young people an intended audience of prevention efforts, but they also can add an authentic and personal voice to community efforts to build a healthy and safe environment for all.

Young people are intimately acquainted with the challenges of growing up healthy and drug-free. They may have insights that adults do not have into underage drinking within their communities. The knowledge they possess also may be more credible to community stakeholders and their peer group, and thus more attention-grabbing than generalized information. Young people can contribute the following:

- Recognition of the prevalence of alcohol use among their peers;
- Understanding of the extent and power of peer pressure to experiment with alcohol and other substances;
- Identification of reasons why their peers might drink;
- Knowledge of where their peers obtain and consume alcohol and how they conceal their drinking; and
- Recommendations of changes to their drinking environment to reduce the risks.

Young people also can substantially influence the values and behaviors of their peers around alcohol use.¹ According to research, adolescents may be particularly susceptible to social influences given their developmental stage and the importance of school and peer groups in their life. Many public health

¹ Steinberg, L., & Monahan K. (2007). Age differences in resistance to peer influence. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(6), 1531–1543.

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BENEFITS TO ORGANIZATIONS OF INVOLVING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS (continued)

campaigns, such as “Students Against Drunk Driving” and the Office of National Drug Control Policy’s “Above the Influence” campaign, have built on the power of peers to motivate others toward healthy decisions.²

Research on peer influence in reducing underage drinking and its consequences has found the following:

- Members of peer groups with more restrictive social norms regarding alcohol use experience fewer alcohol-using occasions and lower odds of binge drinking.³
- Popular youth expressing anti-alcohol norms appear particularly successful in reducing the willingness of their peers to drink.⁴
- Prevention efforts need to simultaneously activate the peer group, the school, the family, and those who organize youth activities to reduce substance use effectively.⁵
- Adolescents who complete peer education programs about alcohol significantly increase their knowledge of alcohol risks and consequences.⁶

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² Brechwald, W., & Prinstein, M. (2011). Beyond homophily: A decade of advances in understanding peer influence processes. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 166–179.

³ Keyes, K., Schulenberg, J., O’Malley, P., Johnston, L., Bachman, J., Li, G., & Hasin, D. (2012). Birth cohort effects on adolescent alcohol use: The influence of social norms from 1976 to 2007. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 69(12), 1304–1313.

⁴ Teunissen, H., Spijkerman, R., Prinstein, M., Cohen, G., Engels, R., & Scholte, R. (2012). Adolescents’ conformity to their peers’ pro-alcohol and anti-alcohol norms: The power of popularity. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, 36(7), 1257–1267.

⁵ Sigfúsdóttir, I., Thorlindsson, T., Kristjánsson, A., Roe, K., & Allegrante, J. (2009). Substance use prevention for adolescents: The Icelandic Model. *Health Promotion International*, 24(1), 16–25.

⁶ Planken, M., & Boer, H. (2010). Effects of a 10-minute peer education protocol to reduce binge drinking among adolescents during holidays. *Journal of Alcohol and Drug Education*, 54(2), 35–52.



BENEFITS TO YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS OF BEING INVOLVED

When young people have the opportunity to lead—and are provided with accurate information, effective skills, and mentoring—they can become change agents in their schools and communities and architects of their own healthy futures. The skills and confidence they acquire provide lifetime benefits. Involved youth gain critical awareness of environmental factors that can make it difficult to succeed, and the tools necessary to work for change in these environments. They also appear to be more civically active later in their lives.⁷ As a result, these young people are more likely to become resilient and less likely to engage in violence and other risky behaviors.⁸

In addition, students who have been involved in youth organizing activities appear to have higher academic and professional goals after high school.⁹ These gains may result from the knowledge and skills they acquired in promoting community change. For instance, many young people learn how to conduct and present research, evaluate policies, speak in large public venues, and negotiate with decision-makers.¹⁰

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⁷ Conner, J. (2011). Youth organizers as young adults: Their commitments and contributions. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(4), 923–942.

⁸ Fergus, S., & Zimmerman, M. (2005). Adolescent resilience: A framework for understanding healthy development in the face of risk. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 26, 399–419.

⁹ Conner, J. (2011). Youth organizers as young adults: Their commitments and contributions. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(4), 923–942.

¹⁰ Christens, B., Collura, J., Kopish, M., & Varvodic, M. (2013). Youth organizing for school and neighborhood improvement. In *Schools and Urban Revitalization: Rethinking Institutions and Community Development*. (Eds K. L. Patterson & R. M. Silverman). Routledge Publishers. pp. 151–166.



EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

Community-based organizations involve young people in the planning, promotion, and presentation of Town Hall Meetings in varying ways. Some organizations give young people full responsibility for putting on an event, and provide training and staff support to help them. Other organizations partner with young people in identifying ways that they can contribute to an effective event.

Because youth and young adults are primary audiences for underage drinking prevention—and also may have great ideas for how to reach and motivate their peers—they can be invaluable to your efforts.

It is important that young people are given not just token assignments, but authentic opportunities to inform the event. Some meaningful tasks that young people can perform include:

- Designing surveys based on issues known to young people, such as parental provision of alcohol and alcohol outlets with low enforcement of ID checks;
- Collecting data on underage drinking from their peers (large sampling will require pre-approval of a school system or other body that ensures the privacy and protection of young people);
- Setting event objectives, identifying intended audiences, and choosing topics to address;

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EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS (continued)

- Developing skits, videos, and other visual and arts-based presentations on underage drinking prevention for the event (many event organizers have found that youth presentations greatly increase attendance, as this draws parents and peers);
- Providing personal anecdotes about the effect of underage drinking on their lives; and
- Inviting other youth and young adults to support media advocacy efforts, including earned media activities by writing op-ed pieces, or inviting reporters to community forums.

Keep in mind that today's young people grew up with social media and can be more adept than adults in using it. Community organizations can draw on this skill by asking young people to conduct tasks such as:

- Creating and implementing a marketing plan that leverages social as well as traditional media;
- Using Facebook and other social media platforms to invite community members to participate in the event;
- Providing live and post-event Twitter or video coverage; and
- Soliciting online feedback about the event and solutions to underage drinking that attendees proposed.

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TIPS ON ENCOURAGING YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPATION

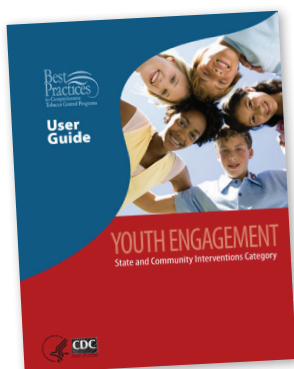
The following tips can help organizations recruit and reward young people for their participation in an event.

- Coordinate efforts with local schools and youth-serving organizations to serve two purposes: 1) recruiting youth members, and 2) engaging diverse groups in your efforts. Encourage these organizations to offer credit for service-learning, volunteering, or classwork for young people.
- Hold meetings at places convenient to students and at times that fit their academic schedules.
- Offer training, resources, and guidance in developing skills that have positive applications beyond your event. Teach young people how to produce a video for your Town Hall Meeting or develop an effective presentation.
- Stress the importance of peer-to-peer communication in sharing underage drinking prevention messages. Point out how young people might receive messaging differently when it comes from their peers, rather than traditional adult voices.
- Encourage young people to propose how they can contribute to your Town Hall Meeting. Give the same consideration and respect to their suggestions and requests as you would to those from adults.

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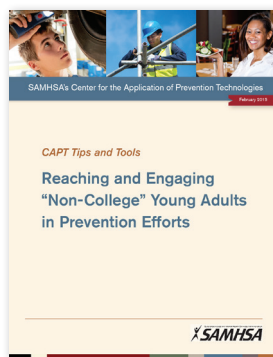


YOUTH ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES



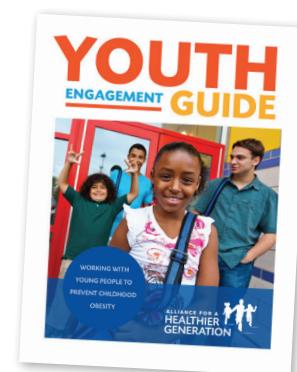
Best Practices User Guide: Youth Engagement—State and Community Interventions

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, a member of ICCPUD, published this guide based on youth engagement in tobacco control programs. The best practices discussed may be readily adapted to underage drinking prevention efforts.



Tips and Tools: Reaching and Engaging “Non-College” Young Adults in Prevention Efforts

This toolkit from SAMHSA is designed to help practitioners working to reduce substance misuse and abuse among non-college young adults find the data they need to inform their planning efforts, and to overcome common challenges to reaching and engaging young adults in prevention efforts.



Youth Engagement Guide: Working With Young People to Prevent Childhood Obesity

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation, founded by the American Heart Association and the Clinton Foundation, provides a practical, example-filled guide to engaging young people in obesity prevention (another public health problem) and the benefits that can follow.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN ACTION AT TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Below are brief success stories from Town Hall Meetings in which young people played a significant and effective role. Read the latest success stories on the Town Hall Meetings website and be inspired!



Youth Talk, Adults Listen in Michigan

The Empowerment Zone Coalition (EZC) in Detroit is a nonprofit organization with a strong emphasis on promoting wellness for the largely African American Eastside community. EZC's 2014 Town Hall Meeting, titled "Think, Don't Drink," was designed to educate youth ages 10 to 18 about the consequences of underage drinking and engage them in prevention. Young people gave powerful testimonies about their experiences with underage drinking and urged others not to use alcohol. The highlight of the program was a live performance by youth members of Real Talk Players in a skit they created, titled "Talk. I Hear You." The title of the skit was inspired by the theme and content of SAMHSA's "Talk. They Hear You." underage drinking prevention campaign.

Students enthusiastically responded to the "Talk. I Hear You." performance, reporting that based on what they had learned, they had decided to avoid alcohol. Both adult and youth audience members planned to share their new knowledge of underage drinking problems and solutions with their peers. In addition, the local Butzel Family Recreation Center also reported an increase in enrollments in their after-school program, which includes alcohol prevention education.

College Students Credited With Event Success at Ohio State University

In preparing for a 2014 Town Hall Meeting, faculty and administrators at Ohio State University (OSU) decided to draw heavily on the energy and skills of students. The university offered four students course credit for a health and rehabilitation sciences class to help Connie Boehm, Director of OSU's Student Wellness Center, organize and host an event focused on the topic of high-risk alcohol use. The student organizers reserved space on the university's highly visited recreation and physical activity center and reached out to residence life staff to publicize the event to students. They also invited speakers and community representatives.



**THE OHIO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

The student organizers created a series of activities and incentives that would appeal to their peers. With their urging, community businesses donated almost \$500 in gift cards. Participants who completed an evaluation of the event could enter their names in a drawing for alcohol-free activities and other prizes. Immediately before the event, the organizers played music and mingled with students in the center to recruit attendees.

About 100 students attended the event and engaged with presenters to learn more about alcohol use consequences. Boehm, inspired by student interest in the issue, began planning a series of similar on-campus activities over the course of the next academic year.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN ACTION AT TOWN HALL MEETINGS (continued)

STOP THE alcoPOPS in California

Friday Night Live works in partnership with young people to change norms, move policies, and educate their communities about what they can do to reduce underage drinking. Middle school students involved in Friday Night Live in Contra Costa, California, were concerned about alcopops and designed a campaign to highlight how the alcohol industry attempts to hide the alcohol in these flavored malt beverages.

After launching their “STOP THE alcoPOPs” campaign, the students pursued a deemed approved ordinance authorizing both the city and county to restrict the sale of alcopops. After meeting with individual policymakers and making presentations to city councils and boards of supervisors, the students were successful in their policy effort at the county level and in several cities. They now are taking their issue to the state and national levels.



Making Prevention Inroads in Wine Country

Youth members of Friday Night Live in Napa, California, spent a year assessing alcohol availability in their community and developing policy recommendations before they conducted a Town Hall Meeting to promote passage of a social host ordinance. Before the meeting, youth leaders generated support through individual visits to local policymakers.

Three members of the Napa County Board of Supervisors, a district attorney, the county sheriff, the county superintendent of schools, and the county alcohol and drug administrator attended the Town Hall Meeting. At the event, Friday Night Live members representing Target Responsibility for Alcohol Connected Emergencies—which seeks to identify the source of alcohol for anyone under age 21 involved in an emergency—presented their data on the availability of alcohol to minors, and provided information about their organization. Adult attendees were invited to sign a pledge to not provide alcohol to minors.

After this event, Napa County enacted its social host ordinance. Friday Night Live youth then began promoting awareness of the ordinance to shift community norms on providing alcohol to minors.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN ACTION AT TOWN HALL MEETINGS (continued)



Underage Drinking Wake-Up Call in Louisiana

Fighting the label that Louisiana is a party state, the Louisiana-based organization ADAPT, Inc. (All Deserve Advocacy, Prevention, & Treatment) and its youth team organized a meeting for lawmakers and parents to recognize underage drinking and other substance use as a serious public health issue in the Bogalusa-Washington Parish area.

The event also promoted evidence-based environmental prevention. Youth discussed recent data about drinking and smoking among their peers, and answered questions and comments from the audience.

Surprised parents and Parish Council members voiced concern about the level of underage drinking in their community and expressed a newfound interest in prevention, including interest in new local policies designed to limit youth access to alcohol and tobacco.

ADAPT is continuing to work with the youth and community members to explore environmental prevention measures such as a local social host law.

Raising the Minimum Legal Drinking Age in Guam

In 2010, Guam's legislature was considering a bill that would raise its legal drinking age to 21. Among other factors that led to the bill's passage was support and advocacy by local youth.

While the bill was under consideration, Youth for Youth LIVE! Guam (YFYLG)—the island's popular youth-driven program for young people ages 11 to 17—sponsored a Town Hall Meeting. The event drew 275 middle school and high school students, many of whom followed up by writing letters, making public statements, and submitting testimonies to the legislature. Lawmakers who had not attended the Town Hall Meeting were quick to take note when many soon-to-be-voting-age young people showed up for their hearings with placards and signs urging the bill's passage.

The legislature passed the bill unanimously.



YOUNG PEOPLE IN ACTION AT TOWN HALL MEETINGS (continued)

Changing the Underage Drinking Environment in Pennsylvania

The nationally recognized Lead and Seed program to reduce alcohol and other drug use by young people is youth-empowered and adult-supported. The Lead and Seed program in Erie County, Pennsylvania, conducts youth-guided Town Hall Meetings during each round of SAMHSA-sponsored events. After each event, Lead and Seed's youth leaders create strategic planning logic models that they use to promote advocacy; action; and changes to their physical, legal, economic, and sociocultural environment.

ERIE COUNTY, PA
LEAD AND SEED

According to the program's curriculum developer, "it is a simple and easy process to start with the Town Hall Meeting and then extract the feedback from that into a viable plan to try to fix the problems of access to and availability of alcohol." Lead and Seed's approach has seen numerous positive results, including the following:

- All law enforcement officers must self-assess their perceptions of area drug and alcohol use.
- The local pizza shop prints underage drinking prevention messages and the state's toll-free number to confidentially report underage drinking on its pizza box tops.
- The baseball stadium no longer posts beer ads on family promotion event nights.
- The school prom/graduation committee pledged to ban mementos that promote alcohol use, such as wine glasses and beer mugs.
- Both parents and youth must pledge to support alcohol-free behavior when students sign up for summer camp.

TOWN HALL MEETING HOSTS ON YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Town Hall Meeting hosts had this to say about youth involvement in 2014 events:

We have hosted Town Hall Meetings before, but this one was by far the best. It's easy to say 'let the youth design and implement the plan,' but the reality is that it is hard to relinquish the reins. In this case, the Town Hall Meeting had a great theme, lots of enthusiasm, and real knowledge and concerns dominated, all led by youth.

The Town Hall Meeting helped launch strategic planning by youth action teams throughout Georgia that focused on underage drinking prevention. It helped them understand the steps of strategic planning (the Strategic Prevention Framework) and the difference between environmental strategies and individual strategies.

We utilized a live survey to immediately assess parental perception of underage drinking to see how it aligned with that of the youth in the community. Although the youth preferred not to present, they were very instrumental in the technical aspects of the meeting, such as posting to social media sites during the meeting.

The Town Hall Meeting included an underage video researched, presented, produced, and edited by youth. The video was shown at the monthly free movie night for the community in the town square. About 250 people were in attendance.

The really neat part about our Town Hall Meeting was that we had a theater play presented by our local high school; after the performance, the students held a Q&A session with the crowd. During this time, the reaction from the audience was enough to get a whole conversation started on the situations that teens are exposed to and the social pressure from other teens.

Our young people would like to host more events like these and really help their community make a change in the way underage drinking is perceived in their island culture as not being a problem.

Youth input was especially compelling and candid. We intend to use this input to drive future efforts by our coalition.

We received positive feedback from attendees about the powerful impact of having youth share their stories and express their desire for communities to engage in providing messaging and deterring underage alcohol use.

The Town Hall Meeting created a safe space for youth, community members, elected officials, parents, and law enforcement to engage in meaningful conversation about underage drinking in our community. Adults listened intently to each word spoken by our youth and longed to unravel more information as time came to an end. One by one, coalition members approached me with a request to always have our youth present during our meetings. Our youth had been heard. Their voices will continue to be heard.

Read the *Communities Talk: Town Hall Meetings to Prevent Underage Drinking Quick Start Planning Guide* for more information on strategies and ideas for hosting an event.

Join the conversation on underage drinking prevention. Follow [#CommunitiesTalk](#) for the latest underage drinking prevention resources and updates.